

House Republican Press Release

March 5, 2004
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Medical Marijuana a Smoke Screen



By State Rep. Toni Boucher, R-143rd, Wilton, New Canaan

After taking decisive action to discourage tobacco smoking, some members of the Connecticut legislature now want to move backward by legalizing the smoking of marijuana for what are described as medical purposes.

This would be an extremely poor lesson for young people in our community, when we are trying to teach them about the dangers of drugs. Our message should be clear, consistent, and continuous. Drugs can debilitate and kill.

As responsible parents, I believe we should do everything we can to deter the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs by our teenagers.

As I testified before a legislative committee in Hartford, we need only to listen to letters and e-mails from doctors and especially to the parents who have lost children to drugs. A Norwalk mother, Ginger Katz of the Courage to Speak Foundation, who lost a son to a drug overdose after he started using marijuana at age 14, provided testimony.

She said, "I am pleading with you because I believe legalizing so-called medical marijuana will only make marijuana more available to Connecticut's children. I lost my beloved son on September 10, 1996. He was a college student and athlete. He had a bright future ahead of him, but it turns out he had started using a little bit of pot at age 14. By the time he was 18, he was using cocaine and, at age 19, heroin. He died in his sleep of an overdose. He was 20 years old. The implicit message this bill sends to children is that marijuana is OK because it's 'medicine'."

But what about medical benefits claimed by marijuana advocates?

Listen to information provided by Robert L. DuPont, M.D., of Georgetown University Medical Center and former director, National Institute Drug Abuse. He said, "The most misunderstood issue surrounding illegal drugs today is the idea that smoked marijuana is a 'medicine.' This misunderstanding is not accidental. There has been, since the 70s, an aggressively orchestrated effort to use this issue as a ramrod to legalize marijuana."

Undoubtedly, smoked marijuana contains many dangerous chemicals, and that the element of marijuana used for treating nausea is available separately in medicine form approved by the FDA without the harmful side effects of smoking marijuana.

Again, here is Dr. DuPont's statement: "The simple point to be emphasized is that burning leaves do not make medicine. Medicines, for over a hundred years, in all countries in the world have been specific,

purified chemicals which are shown to be effective in the treatment of specific diseases and to be safe in that use at that dose. Burning leaves do not work as medicines because their smoke contains hundreds, and often thousands, of chemicals, many of which are biologically active, in doses that are completely unpredictable and often toxic.”

Recent medical advances have derived drugs from the marijuana plant that can be administered without the impure toxic chemicals contained in crude smoked marijuana. We can be compassionate to sick people by encouraging the use of safe, effective medicines recommended by modern pharmaceutical science, the medical profession and federal regulators such as the FDA.

Last year, the Connecticut legislature spent the better part of day debating legalization of marijuana for medical uses. That issue was voted down, but its supporters are back again this year.

As a former member of state and town boards of education, a member of the legislature’s Education Committee and as a mother of three, I feel strongly compelled to oppose this legislation once again.

How much money and effort have we spent trying to keep kids from starting down this path? And now, should we say, “Oh, it’s OK; it’s just medicine?”

Even if the Connecticut legislature were to pass the legislation, it would still be a violation of federal law to prescribe or use marijuana for medical purposes. I would like to go on record as opposing House Bill 5355, and I hope you will as well.

If you would like to assist in the effort to defeat this bill, please e-mail, fax or write to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the legislature’s Judiciary Committee, or contact the Speaker of the House at 1-800-842-1902.

If you would like to contact me on this or any other issues, please do not hesitate to call my office at the Capitol 1-800-842-1423, by fax at 860-240-0207 or e-mail at Toni.Boucher@housegop.state.ct.us. Thank you.